

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **New Wallace Foundation Guide Details How Arts Organizations Can Use Market Research to Strengthen Audience-Building Efforts**

***Taking Out the Guesswork* provides practical insights and strategies based on evidence drawn from the experiences of 10 arts organizations**

**NEW YORK, June 9, 2015** – The Wallace Foundation today released a new, free guide designed to help arts organizations use market research to identify ways to build meaningful connections with different audiences. [\*Taking Out the Guesswork: Using Research to Build Arts Audiences\*](#) draws on evidence gathered from 10 organizations across the United States, including visual arts institutions, theaters, dance and opera companies. The guide provides valuable insight and detailed guidelines on how to learn more about current and potential audiences, create effective promotional materials, and more effectively track and assess the results of new audience-building initiatives.

“Arts leaders across the country have recognized and are seeking to tackle the growing problem of waning audiences in the field. However, they all too often invest their resources in new initiatives without first gathering insights from the communities they are trying to reach,” said Daniel Windham, Director of Arts, The Wallace Foundation. “*Taking Out the Guesswork* demonstrates the importance of that first step, helping leaders overcome possible misconceptions and simultaneously providing organizations across the country with the evidence-based strategies to launch their own research.”

Written by New York City-based market research expert Bob Harlow, *Taking Out the Guesswork* is the ninth and newest publication in the [\*Wallace Studies in Building Arts Audiences\*](#) series— all stemming from the foundation’s **Wallace Excellence Awards** initiative designed to create effective and broadly applicable audience-engagement practices for the arts field at-large. It is available as a free download in the online Wallace Knowledge Center at [www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org).

The audience research guidebook distills evidence gathered from 10 arts organizations that received Wallace Excellence Award grants. The organizations include: the Boston Lyric Opera, The Clay Studio, The Contemporary Jewish Museum, Fleisher Art Memorial, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Minnesota Opera, Pacific Northwest Ballet, San Francisco Girls Chorus, Seattle Opera, and Steppenwolf Theatre Company. The guidebook highlights examples from several of these organizations to illustrate how research techniques were used to learn about, attract and retain desired audiences. Along with narrative examples from the organizations, there are step-by-step instructions for conducting the most common type of market research for that particular audience-building activity.

*Taking Out the Guesswork* illustrates how research can support three tasks essential to successful audience building (see [infographic](#)):

- **Learning about potential audiences.** The WEA organizations found that it was vital to gather a better understanding of their audiences and not make assumptions about who comprises them. Qualitative research strategies, such as fielding focus groups, provided organizations with a clearer idea of what different target audiences thought of the institution and its programming, and how those perceptions influenced their decisions to visit, become a member or participate in a new initiative. Arts groups used this knowledge to eliminate barriers and create programs that made their art and institutions more accessible to both newcomers and existing audiences.
- **Creating effective promotional materials.** Through research, organizations were able to discover how audiences reacted to websites, brochures and other marketing materials. Many found that the impact of current materials was either negligible or negative and were able to adjust imagery and language to better communicate the artistic experience.
- **Tracking and assessing results.** The WEA organizations realized they did not have systems in place to determine whether a particular audience-building effort was actually working. Surveys were used to gather data following initiatives, to ensure that results met goals. Research helped institutions determine where they could scale back on costs and what was producing results and should be continued.

“When we embarked on our WEA initiative, we knew we wanted to attract more teens and young adults to our programs, but we didn’t know what was keeping them away in the first place,” said Ellen Walker, executive director of Pacific Northwest Ballet. “By conducting research via focus groups, surveys and market tests, we learned a great deal about the perceptions and motivations of young audiences. The results were surprising, insightful and actionable, allowing us to create new and informed initiatives and marketing tools that continue to be successful in bringing teens and young adults to Pacific Northwest Ballet. I hope *Taking Out the Guesswork* will help other organizations embrace market research as the first step in effectively engaging audiences.”

The Wallace Foundation has a 25-year history of supporting the arts, with a particular emphasis on building audiences. The WEA initiative – a multi-year effort that concluded in 2014 – supported audience-building projects in 54 visual and performing arts organizations in six cities around the country: Boston, Chicago, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Seattle. Across the 46 WEA recipients that provided reliable data, the results were promising. Over a period that averaged three years, the organizations seeking an increase in the size of their overall audience saw median gains of 27 percent, while those targeting growth of a specific segment saw median gains of 60 percent.

An analysis of 10 case studies of these projects identified nine evidence-based actions that organizations can take to successfully engage audiences. The analysis, [The Road to Results: Effective Practices for Building Arts Audiences](#), also written by Bob Harlow, is available on the Wallace website, along with seven of the ten [case studies](#). In summer 2015, Wallace is scheduled to release the remaining case studies: for Fleisher Art Memorial (Philadelphia), The Clay Studio (Philadelphia) and The Contemporary Jewish Museum (San Francisco).

Building on the success of the Wallace Excellence Awards, Wallace recently launched a six-year [Building Audiences for Sustainability](#) initiative, which will provide support and funding to 26 outstanding performing arts organizations across the United States to attract new audiences while retaining current ones -- in ways that contribute to the organization’s financial health. Their experiences and accomplishments will be independently documented and analyzed and publicly shared, with the goal of providing useful resources for the entire field.

For more information, please visit: [www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org).

## **About The Wallace Foundation**

*Based in New York City, The Wallace Foundation is an independent national philanthropy dedicated to fostering improvements in learning and enrichment for disadvantaged children and the vitality of the arts for everyone. It seeks to catalyze broad impact by supporting the development, testing and sharing of new solutions and effective practices. At [www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org), the Foundation maintains an online library about what it has learned, including knowledge from its current efforts aimed at: strengthening education leadership to improve student achievement; helping selected cities make good afterschool programs available to more children; expanding arts learning opportunities for children and teens; providing high-quality summer learning programs to disadvantaged children and enriching and expanding the school day in ways that benefit students; and helping arts organizations to build their audiences.*

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